

Fortnightly Sermon

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FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER
IN RELIGION

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FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER IN RELIGION.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the Children of God." Rom viii 16.

Grand words are these of Paul. They mean that religion grows in the heart by nature, and that God witnesses of himself in the soul. Religion has taken a great step in these times. Once it was conceived as something coming down from above and put into man; but now, as coming up out of man, growing with his growth. At least, so *we* think of Religion, and all the world seems to us surely coming to the same thought. This is a very great change indeed, and very blissful. For if Religion be in and of the heart, and comes of it, then it gathers all men together as into one family, all being at one in the source and nature of religion where it arises, however they may differ in thinking of it when it has arisen. Now if thus by this new thought of Religion, that it is in man by nature and grows with him, not put into him from outside him, men be brought into one great family, then it follows that they must live together with the virtues and the principles of a family. Now these virtues may be summed up in three,—the justice among all the members which leaves each free, and the love which binds all together in fellowship, and the personal goodness of character by which each is a worthy member. These three virtues of the household, and of the family of many households which is mankind, we take for the expression of our new thought of piety—"Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion." This is the living principle of our church.

What is Freedom in Religion? I ask and answer this question the more gladly because I know not what needs more to be explained than Freedom. For as Freedom is both a very vast power and assured fact, sure to possess the world, it will be, like any great engine or tool, either a waste, if men understand it not, or an injury if they misconceive and misuse it. In these days Freedom is made a party-cry or a war-cry, or a sort of talismanic word as if the mere speaking of it were a magic to open the doors of all happiness and wealth. It is shouted foolishly or madly or revengefully; and many so use it as fairly to unhinge themselves from that axis of order and obedience on which the world turns. It is no little thing therefore to ask, What Freedom is, and especially Freedom in Religion. For if Freedom in Religion be understood, it will be like to sanctify all other freedom with soberness and peace.

Freedom in Religion has three meanings or parts. First, all agree that it means at least so much as this, namely, Independence of any outward dictation or authority in our thinking. It declares that no man, nor men, nor companies of men, nor institutions, nor eras, nor documents, books, writings, can have any commission to settle for a human being what he shall think, or to enforce agreement, if that were possible, with any creed. This right of every person carries a duty with it, as it is the nature of a right to do so. For it is the duty of every man to possess himself. When one has grown to man's stature in body, it is his duty to be a man also in mind. And if this be duty, then the duty is the highest and most sacred in respect to the highest and most sacred things, which are religious truths. To give up our thinking at any command, no matter by what sanction, whether of church or book or miracle or prophet, to let any other do our thinking for us, to take ready-made what we shall believe and to believe it without thinking,—this is the peculiar quality of very early childhood. But when, while still young, the child begins to question and is full of wishes to know reasons and causes, this is no perversion or depravity, but nature at her business of growing. To carry the infantile quality of implicit acceptance into manhood, is to be unfaithful to the highest duty of mind, and to abdicate its crown and royalty. Such an act is abject. It may be that thought is painful and doubts

press hard. What of it? A king must not resign his crown because it is heavy. Nay, though it cut into his brow, he has a duty to his people. So must a man wear the crown of thought, even if it be, like the Master's, a crown of thorns, because he has a duty to the world. This then is the first meaning of Freedom in Religion—that we have title and duty to think.

Secondly, Freedom in Religion means also right and title to utter our thoughts, saying what we think simply and truthfully. For if to give up thought be supine, to give assent against thought or without thought is untruthful. Now here you will see that I touch on the claim of the great church of the ages, which always has demanded and enforced assent. For the church has known that it could not control the realms of thought except through fear, superstition and ignorance; for whenever a man broke through these, then in the invisibility of his mental states, he might think what he would or must, and none could see. Therefore, the church has sought indirect control by teaching that it is the duty of the soul to believe, without inquiry, what the church declares true. In this effort the great church has had much success, for by molding the plastic mind of childhood it has brought up hosts of people in this subjection, which has robbed them of the very stuff and joy of mind. But what if thought go astray by some misfortune, or, as they say, by reason of the natural wickedness of the heart, so that one *can not* believe as the church ordains? "Then," says the church, "If you *consent* not at heart, still you must *assent* by will; you must say—If I see not this to be true, or even in fact see it false, as I do, yet I know it is true because so the church says, and I assent to it." Now this is untruthful; for simply it utters with the mouth what is denied in the mind, and declares we believe on authority what we know well we believe not for itself. What then would be the truthful way if we should find ourselves at once venerating an authority or teacher and dissenting from a creed or doctrine thereof? It would be the truthful course to say—I can not believe this thing; it is no question of will, to do as I choose, but of thought, which goes its own way as it must; yet so I venerate the authority and so well I know my own weakness and fallibleness that I will wait, strive and wrestle with this thing; but I can not say with my mouth

that I *assent* till in my heart I do *consent*; and if never I *consent*, then at last I must say this freely, for to me it will be the truth. This, I say, would be the noble way. But against this good way, the church has set itself, for it will have naught but assent with the mouth whatever the mind be thinking. Nay, the church has punished honest speech with chains or the stake, calling it heresy; in which very word the church has branded its act as a hatred of honesty; for heresy means to inquire, and a heretic is but an inquirer or asker after light, who does no more than say he is in the dark and is seeking his way, or, perhaps, that this way or that way looks to him like the right one. The church has forbidden so much as the asking of a question; though in these latter days it has grown wiser, or else perforce has yielded to the spirit abroad, since it can not resist; and which way it is, I know not.

We say, then, that Freedom in Religion, meaning, first, the right and title to think, secondly, carries with it also right and title to speak our thoughts with peace.

Now, thirdly, Freedom in Religion means to be free of ourselves. This is a personal and holy sense of it. It means to stand above ourselves and judge ourselves, till we be free from the insidious bondage of our own prejudice and passion. It involves the keeping of our mind large, open, friendly to thought and hospitable to any question. Who is free if he be enlisted in little wars of passion and creed, in the jealousies of a dogmatic or narrow education which mislead thought or even turn the mind against thinking? Are we free if, having cast off the yoke of foreign dictation, we remain under that of our own prejudice, ignorance or fear? What matter whether we be shackled by an outward authority or by passionate habits of mind?—Nay, but it does matter. For to be slaves of ourselves is the worst slavery. Phillips Brooks has these brave words,—“ I dread with all my heart to be the first man who turns away from any old statement of truth, simply out of mere willfulness, simply because it has become monotonous, if it still expresses the truth of our time. But I dread a great deal more to be the last man who stands by an old statement of truth, simply because of its familiarity, if it has ceased to express the real religious life and thoughtfulness of the days in which God has placed us.”

Freedom of ourselves means to be lifted to a calm light. When into this we come, no more we are whirled about by gusts of jealousies, clamorous doctrines, passions, prejudices, opinions. These things befog the mind, shrouding us in a thick, black mist through which we can not find our way to think; nay, in the very thick of the mist they poison the soul as with a sleeping draught or benumbing liquor, so that not even we have a wish to find our way to thought, but sit down by the wayside, content to be wrapt in the indolent fog. But when a man is free of himself in respect of religion, then he is able to clear his way to the truth, because he *will* do it, and he will hold any doctrine for no reason but that he thinks it the truth; and this reason he will hold so sacred that on the first suspicion that he has not the truth, quickly he will examine, search, and test with a free and glowing mind, that he may find the truth wherein alone is rest and power. Fontanelle, when near his death, said, "It is time for me to go, for I have begun to see things as they are,"—a sad reason, indeed, for dying; ay, and a faithless one, not rich with the liberty and the courage of the sons of God. For what can make this life or any life so glorious as to escape from all appearance into reality and begin to see things as they are. For then no more we grope blindly or sit basely in mists of passions, prejudices, conflicts, creeds; but we arise, and being ready to move, Freedom takes us by the hand and leads us out beyond and over the fog-wall, where on a height we have a great expanse of nature before us. What true expanse of nature is not both glorious and awful? Also to be free of ourselves is to be free of fear, which is another splendor of it, a shining, majestic, masterful quality of soul, whereby a man becomes so free of himself that even he thinks not of himself; yes, he thinks no more of what may come to him to-morrow for following the truth than of what he thought yesterday which might keep him from following; but he follows on because his mind works and thinks and leads him to the glory of liberty. He is then a figure like Demosthenes, who counted not the cost to himself, nor so much as looked at it, or if he turned an eye on it straightway looked away with scorn, and said to the Athenians, "My counsels to you are of such nature that sometimes they are not good for me to give, but always are good for you to follow."

This freedom of ourselves, as I have said, is the noblest of all liberty; in truth there is none like it. It is like an eagle whose wings fly in the highest regions, whose talons drag all other liberties after it. For we can both think and speak in freedom of others, if first we be free gloriously of our passions and fears. Samuel Johnson said that, "Political liberty is good only so far as it produces private liberty," which, indeed, is so; and, therefore, the noblest social liberty is that which leads to the most private kind of freedom, and that is freedom within oneself, neither to be caged without motion, nor to be tossed about with furious struggling by our obstinacies or passions, but free to explore for the truth. The man who is tied by himself is two-fold a slave, a slave enslaved by a slave.

Who will arm himself with his passions and plume his head with flaunting creeds to go out to war for the truth? Who will be such a mad man of La Mancha astride a Rosinante? Who will be so impudent as to take on him to protect the truth, and not humbly see rather that it came and converted him from his errors and weakness? Yet everywhere the world is full of the cries and buffetings of men who, not being free of themselves nor living in the calmness and courage of real liberty, don all their passions and go out to take care of the truth; which, reverently I say, is the business of the Almighty Power, who never hath failed in it since first the morning stars sang together. I know not what is more impious than to go about to take care of the truth by any other way than by opening the doors to thought that it may walk and pass everywhere freely. Religious reasoning should be uttered by everyone as calmly as a chemical discovery, and with no more concern that it survive. For however one strive or plot or kill, he can give no thought any more life than it has, and no one is commissioned to protect a thought, but only to give it space. Protect the truth? Take thinking under our patronage? Wall around the truth with men's devices, conventions, priesthoods, creeds and statements? Assemble first to protect Niagara that none shall dam up its waters! Convene to protect Mount Blanc that men shall not lift it away, nor polish its sides with the powered Jungfrau! Sit in congress at the Eddystone to protect the ocean that men drain it not with basins or tap its floor till it run away! Gather

on hill-tops to protect the stars that the little children may not flch the pretty balls for their games! Then when these things be done, sit ye in church, conference or council to protect the truth,—which, if it stand, is like a mountain, or if it move is like a torrent, and goeth all around the earth like the ocean, and liveth above all clouds and cometh out of them like a star.

Freedom in Religion truly is a great trust and faith. It means that we lean on the serene order and perfect power which make for truth and right, and we are filled with courage and joy since we know the truth needs not to be bestead by us, but is hedged by its own divinity, and will show the greater the more daylight is poured on it. Therefore we become large entertainers of thought, ready to search anything both reverently and fearlessly, whether an old sanctity or a new doctrine, dreading not the high air of thought, for it is our home,—“like the bird which, perched on some frail thing, though he feels the branch bend under him, yet sings loudly, knowing well that he has wings.”

The second point in our threefold principle is Fellowship in Religion. If religion be somewhat that is put into man, according to the old thought of it, then it is the same always; but if it spring up out of man, as is the new thought of it, then it will be as different in each case as the men are. But that it springs in all is a greater fact than that, having sprung up, it is found different in many. Wherefore it makes the meeting of man with man to found on that greater fact; and this is Fellowship. “Fellowship in Religion is to bring the brotherhood of man into religion so that the bond of humanity is put above that of creed or church or any other thing. This will teach us not to set bounds anywhere, as to say, We will receive all Christians but not a Jew, or, We will receive all Jews and Christians but no others; but to say as Paul did, that we receive all, being made of one blood and walking under the common sky of the One Creator and Father.”

Fellowship in Religion places the humane relations before doctrinal ones, so that we meet as men however separated we be in thought. This brings into religion the unity of human brotherhood, which is a fact wider than religion. For religion is but one thing which springs in a man by nature; besides which

there are many more, like love, thought, pity, ambition, and many such; as to all which, men are in brotherhood. Now, Fellowship in Religion, since religion is part of the total brotherhood of men, draws sanctity from the brotherhood, and then is of a kind to turn about and touch all other points of brotherhood with a holy fire. It is thus a gentle and right recognition of brotherhood, not only in faith and hope but in thinking over these, whereby we become open to all persons from the side of thought, to compare views both kindly and strictly, and to listen, and to reason together; for as much as we are more at one in seeking the truth than we are two or many by coming at different ends in our search. One man said to another, "I wish to bring a friend to you; I wish him to know you." "Certainly, bring him." "But he thinks very differently from you." "But consider how much more he is like me if he thinks, than unlike me by thinking differently; bring him by all means." Now if the thinking of these men were about religion, then this story shows fellowship in religion, which thus binds man to man when it is known that religion comes up in each by nature.

I said in the beginning that this Fellowship was one of the virtues of the family. This is to say that it is a form of love. For consider how much we all need each other. Sidney Morse says, "We are all alike. This equality is not of merit, nor of greatness; rather of our nothingness; equal we are in God,—in being by our individual selves nothing. Who is great alone? Who is rich alone? Isolation, then, is weakness, poverty, ignorance,—blank and eternal. But in society we are heirs of all there is. You and I and every soul, is thus endowed; we are nothing; we are all the universe holds." What could any one body among you, the proudest, the strongest, do without those other bodies which conspire to clothe, to feed, and protect that one? Or even without those humble living creatures, the blades of grass, the spears of green waving trees, and even the earthworm, whose intimate connection with your being, your muscles and sinews, nature has been working at for ages and ages? And what could any one heart and mind among you, the hardest and bravest, do without all these others which run into your life with joy and with help forevermore, as "as all the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full?"

But does this Fellowship with men mean lukewarmness for our ideas? Does it imply that we hold our views loosely as of little import to the world, or unearnestly as of little moment to ourselves? Nay, it is the very essence of deep fellowship that we be true and fervent toward our own thoughts, while keeping a large and generous companionship with those who cherish other thoughts. For in what things do we seek fellows? Surely in the things which we value and believe fervently. In these we yearn for companionship. When we believe in religion as a holy fact of the heart, deeper than all creeds or thoughts of it, then we shall reach out on all sides for the dear ties of Fellowship. But how can we be persuaded mightily of the greatness and beauty of the religion which runs in all creeds and goes with all names, unless we be fervent for our own thoughts of it as pure, noble, true and helpful to mankind? But though we be fervent for our own thoughts and seek to teach and spread them because we believe them deeply, yet Fellowship in Religion will make fervor large and beautiful, teaching us not to be shocked or confounded at anything, nor to give anything an ill name, so it be earnest and truthful in purpose, lowly and brave in spirit.

But although this be the way of peace and truth and love, yet it is an old saying that, "God maketh the wrath of man to praise him," and if there had been always a gentle worship and never hatred and cruelty for difference in thinking, where were those great heroisms, those divine sufferings which have fed the world? As a forest of trees may be fostered and fed by the ashes of a few trees, so hath the world flourished on the ashes of martyrs. If always a precious and gentle fellowship had attended religion, then we should have no Eleazar "going immediately to the torment that by manfully changing this life he might show himself such a one as his age required, and leave a notable example to such as be young to die willingly and courageously for honorable and holy laws;" then no Socrates would have stood before the Dikasts saying with a proud voice like the sound which a storm draws from an oak tree, "You may kill me, O Athenians, but you will not soon get another such man to tell you what you ought to do," and afterward among his friends with the simplicity of a child saying, "Yes, you may bury me, where you will, if you can catch me;" then no Paul would have

preached love universal, and withstood the Petrines to the face, and have hurled down division-walls with a voice more terrible than the trumpets at Jericho,—cast out for the same, beaten and left for dead by the wayside, and at last whirled away to heaven by fire and sword, too swiftly for memory to seize on it; then no Jesus would have been seized, even while yearning toward the people as to sheep without a shepherd, and buffeted, scourged, “crowned with thorns, drenched with gall and nailed to a cross,” while he said to bewailing women, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children;” then no Confucius would have been driven unto old age from place to place, an outcast and a wanderer, but steadfast and grand, until he was broken and falling like an old tree propped, and ready for the ground; then no Huss, with the gentleness of a lamb and the courage of a lion would have faced quietly a concourse of raging prelates and gone to heaven in the flames ignited from their hearts; then no Savonarola would have preached with a fiery zeal which at last lighted his own pyre; and no Fra Domenico would have braved extremity of torture unflinching for the so glorious truth of such a grand master; then no Latimer and Ridley would have walked to the fagots as to a seat of mighty power, constant but solemnized, the one saying, “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle in England, by God’s grace, as, I trust, shall never be put out;” then no heroic constancy of gentle women, the old, the weak, the shrinking, would have glorified the earth—such as in the persecutions of the Jews, of the Huguenots, of the Albigenians, as when at the capture of a castle, the commander of the forces of the Church agreed that all the defenders who would abjure their heresy might go out unharmed, and when his bloodthirsty troops murmured at this because they would be deprived of their victims, said to them, “Be not alarmed; I know these heretics; no one will recant,” and, indeed, spoke rightly, for they clung to their faith and were burned, seven scores of them, meeting death and torture with prayers and hymns—names unknown and unsung, but their life not lost, yea, imparted to you and to me! Yes, verily, if Fellowship in Religion always had been in the world, then would these great splendors not have been, nor human heroism risen

almost into divinity. And yet, alas, what pain, what woe, what wrenching of every holy affection, what partings worse than death, what despair and cries and prayers have gone with these glories! Worse than this, what dreadful passions, foaming hatreds, gloating cruelty have turned the rack, whirled the sword, kindled the fagots! These were an army of giants of human frenzies, rages, treacheries and cruelties. They have gone, and as they passed along the highway of the ages they grew smaller, for the giants enlisted early, and afterward smaller people that perchance frothed with as much rage, but had not the power; and they too are gone. If any one in this age join the forces which are against Fellowship in Religion, if he will not reason calmly with his brother, if for honest difference in thought, to what degree soever, he has exiled his brother and drawn away from him, let him know that he is no more than one of some little dwarfs clinging to the rear of the vanishing army of persecutors, hideously distorted of like passions with the giants, but puny and contemptible in limb.

The third point in these primary principles of our Church is Character in Religion. This follows on Freedom and Fellowship. For if a pure idea of Freedom and Fellowship forbid all doctrinal tests and fences, there is nothing left but Character to be the ground of union. What then is Character in Religion? It means that what man *is*, is the supreme matter; not what he says or does in church or elsewhere, nor what be his prayers or hymns or creeds, but what really he *is* in the depths of his heart. Also Character in Religion means that however loud the voice or ready the mouth, the knee and hand, in observance, no man's religion or worship can be better or purer than his soul's depths. It may be better than he *seems* to be—and this is a blessed fact. Many persons are better deep in the unseen emotions of the heart than ever they seem to others; yea, many who have great and sorrowful faults still have a depth in them of very simple and sincere purity. It is out of these depths that worship springs. But no man can upraise a prayer purer than truly he is himself. Character in Religion gives a firm base on which feeling may build its temple with towers and spires. For emotion in religion may be either a shallow or bad indulgence. It is so when it is based on fear or

desire, or on aught but simple goodness; still more when it is put in the place of character, deemed to atone for bad morals and to serve instead of a good life. This is the burden of the Hebrew prophets, those most stern and sublime of all preachers. In Kuenen's words, "The demands which Jahveh makes upon his people are moral demands. They are continually repeated with the greatest emphasis and earnestness; the transgressions of these commandments by the large majority of Israel, especially by the leaders and men of distinction, is the theme of most of the prophetic addresses. The solemn declaration that Jahveh takes no delight in the noise of feasts is followed in Amos by the order:

'But rather let judgment run down as water,
And righteous as an ever-flowing stream.'

And Isaiah exhorts:

'Wash you, make you clean,
Put away the evil of your doing from before mine eyes,
Cease to do evil, learn to do well,
Seek judgments, turn away the oppressors,
Do justice to the fatherless, defend the cause of the widow.'

And no less striking is Micah, who gives the question of the pious Israelite and his own answer in this form:

'Wherewith shall I come before Jahveh,
And bow myself down before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
With the sacrifices of calves a year old?
—Will Jahveh be pleased with thousands of rams,
With ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
—He hath showed thee, O man, what is good
And what Jahveh doth require of thee;
What but to do justly, to love mercy,
And to walk humbly with thy God?'

Yes, and the test whether one walk humbly with God in religion is whether he do justly and love mercy in life. Loves he his fellow-beings more? Is he gentler to those under him? more patient with dullness? more forgiving, forbearing and kind, to neighbor, friend, or enemy? more thoughtful of the poor? more generous and unselfish? more careful of another's good name? slow to believe evil? quicker to believe good? more self-sacrificing? more sympathizing? more fair, honest, scrupulous? more noble in aim? less given to riches and pride? less self-in-

dulgent? more thoughtful? more spiritual? more intellectual? more religious? Alas! for the man who works hard six-sevenths of his time to over-reach his neighbor, and sets apart the other seventh to get the better of God, who thinks, "to atone by a decorous pietism for a censorious temper, fawning on God, devouring men."

In a certain ancient time there was a poor man living in a common house in a little town. Yet it was a house as good as most of his neighbors', for the town was a poor place. This house, if you will picture it, was but a square box of stone, with a turf roof, and a latticed window and a door for light—a dim dwelling, no better than a large cell, with no furniture but a few mats, a chest and some water jars; and the room served for kitchen and eating place and sleeping room in one. How often has nature chosen humble origins for great things! So was this common dwelling: for the poor man who lived in it grew to be a great lord, king, and leader of other men's minds, and for a time people gathered around him with songs and shouts of exultation and homage. And this was better than sometimes it is; for he was a noble soul as well as a great leader. Obedience, love, honor and worship were paid to him by his followers, and this the more because he taught them about religion. For when any leader is great enough and good enough to teach men about religion, he is more adored than any other teacher. At last came the time for the great king and leader to be taken away, for none can live forever, and he told his people what was the one supreme, living, everlasting truth of religion, the truth above every truth. And what was this? What great lord coming out of a little hovel, in an obscure city, courted with such submission and love by his followers, and feeling the spirit of power stir in him, might not say to his disciples, "Obey me! Follow my words! Worship my authority and keep the faith which I have given you!" Yet not so spoke this master; but he said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. And many will say to me in my day of triumph, 'Lord, Lord, did we not preach in your name and in your name cast out demons and wrought many miracles in your name?' But I will declare unto them, I never knew

you. Depart from me ye that work iniquity." Honor of him was of no potency, nor any service of him to be counted for them; nay, if they fed not the hungry, and thirsty, took not in the stranger, clothed not the naked, visited not the sick, and went not to them that were in prison, and did not thus unto the least and humblest, then they had a spirit of neglect in their hearts which was the same as neglect of their lord. Nay, so did he set the heart above all, that when he saw a poor woman give the smallest coin, he said, "She hath given riches past all the rich." Thus did this mighty lord, before whom the people shouted; and if they had not shouted the very stones would have cried out. He put away all forms, creeds, names, to sanctify simple goodness in religion.

Now we have looked at Freedom and Fellowship and Character. There is yet the fourth term, Religion. We assert not only Freedom for the mind, Fellowship for the heart, and Character for the conscience, but we assemble all these in Religion. And in this we differ widely from many persons who would take all the other thoughts with us heartily. There are many who applaud liberty; who declare for good and humble fellowship, seeing clearly that it is indeed a part of liberty: who enforce the worth of character both by precept and by high example: but they look at these by themselves, and not assemble them in Religion, and indeed take little thought of religion, or even make light of it. But we say not only Freedom, but Freedom in Religion, and not only Fellowship, but Fellowship in Religion, and not only Character, but Character in Religion. Freedom is one aspect of human rights; Fellowship is one view or field of humane duties; Character respects the sanctity of individual goodness; Religion belongs to them all in our principles and purposes, glorifying them and binding them all together in our church life.

And what is Religion? A vast question which I will not try to answer now. But you all feel well enough for this present purpose what that great word means. Two things I will say about it as related to our church, I mean to our purposes and feelings in here gathering together for help in religious thought and life. The first relates to the *thought* and *feeling* which is religion, the second to the *expression* of it.

As to the thought and feeling which the word Religion enshrines, take this alone at present, that we all find ourselves involved and immersed in Mystery. Whatever else we do, we must wonder. There can be no end of our wonder, our awe-breathing marveling, when we simply look around us and think of the earth, the sky, the creatures. Whatever else we know is as nothing compared to our knowledge of the infinite that it is beyond knowledge, and yet that we live in it and look and wonder. Above in the sky, is mystery, and mystery beyond mystery, farther than eye can sweep, father than the lenses which aid the eye can penetrate that array of suns and systems and stars interlaced rising above each other forever.

"Bethink thee,—
This vast of peopled space of burning suns!
If on the pinions of terrific wind,
Potent to rend strong oaks, to tear down towers,
Tossing their guns like playthings in the air,
And twisting huge wrought-iron beams to curls,
If on this wind, I say, thou shouldst be borne,
Past moon, past sun, to catch a star, how long
Would be thy dizzy journey? A hundred years?
Yea, and a hundred hundred, and that by
A thousand, and that doubled still—yea, more—
Riding on the back of a hurricane,
To reach the nearest of the gleaming globes
That kindle watch-fires in the arch of space,
Like beacons set in a cathedral dome.
And from that star a great new firmament
Of stars thou wouldst behold, worlds on worlds rolling
Upon thy vision, here invisible,
Strange constellations of shining creatures
Sketching their mythic pictures on new skies,
Red orbs and fiery nebulae, weird planets
Stranger than Saturn, and fierce, hairy comets.
And if upon that star thou shouldst out-single
The faintest gleam of light, and leap to it,
Another firmament would rise before thee,
With worlds piled to the zenith, And so following,
Forever and forever and forever,
And still forever multiplied forever.

* * *

Truly, compared with the infinitude
Which hath no end on either hand, or up,
Or down, this system of huge worlds, their moons,
And monstrous sun binding them all together,
Are but as fine dust, cast by a man's hand
Into the sky."

But not only in this infinite realm, star-peopled, do we confront the holy and inevitable mystery. This fond earth trembles with the life of the heavens. It is a star swimming in immensity, and we go swimming with it, and hence know the

special wonders of its bosom, at least in some little part. Wherever we turn our eyes, to our feet, or around us, or over some stretch of mountain, vale, ocean,—a bit, a mole, a bubble compared to the depths of starry space,—is wonder and awe, and awe and wonder, inseparable forever.

“ The mollusk and the polyp,
The diatoms, whose thin silicious skins
Deposit deep beds of white, shining sand,
And hosts of strange and living little creatures
In water, earth, or air,—these are the dust's dust:
Yea, and on this imperious rolling ball,
What is man's body but a grain or mote?
And yet how spins the earth unhazarded,
And singing on its way serenely roves
Around the sun; how prompt the seasons are,
How full of lucious juices and sweet waters!
How lordly planets make their grave obeisance
Unto the central king, revolving round him
And glowing in his light so vividly
That they may be descried by day, not hidden
Even by the sun's prodigious beam! How softly
And faithfully the moons attend their worlds,
Reflecting the sun's smile over the shoulder
Of night when that brown nurse bids day begone
And frowns upon the too indulgent light!
How man's body thrives, and the little insects,
And zoophytes rooted like plants—how all
Flourish and swarm, momentous to the Power
That throws a comet, sets a sun aflame,
And squeezes nebulae till worlds oze out.
Before Almightyness, the whole is naught!
But to All-lovingness the polyp's hunger
Cries, and the beast's pangs in his barren den.”

But after searching the starry spaces and this earth, yet hardly we have begun to wonder, we have stepped but on the threshold of marveling, we but totter as a babe in the portico of astonishment. Amazement, admiration, prodigy, miracle are yet to come. Bow thy head now in admiration, while thou lookest into the ineffable depth and spectacle of thyself. Forth comes a thought; what is it? whence? It sweeps the heavens with one sense and the earth with all senses; what are these marvels of senses which brush from the skies and gather from the earth the foods of thought and the materials of meditation? Whence these ecstasies, the pains, the fears, the sacrifices of love? Out of what depths comes heroisms? Out of what element in imperfection leaps the thought of the perfect? Whence in our bondage the dream of freedom, greater than the eagle's flight? Whence in death's presence the thought of the deathless? How come the mighty leap to immortal hopes, and thoughts of

things to which no senses pierce? Thus, with wonder, I wonder at myself. What am I? How came I? What are these reports in me? What are these marvels that keep rising in me and declare themselves to have become myself?

And if I can not tell, if I can only lose myself in the infinite, if the skies and the earth, and I who see both and walk on one, are all together miracles, and fellows in marvels, majesties, auguries, auspices, beyond all reach of word and thought,—what shall I say of me, an infinite mystery to myself, looking out on these infinite depths of mystery? Is this not the mystery recognizing the mystery, the marvels of thought and love knowing themselves again? Is not my wonder at all things a going out towards somewhat like itself of that somewhat in me,—that which indeed is I, yet which I know not, but stand wondering in my wonder-self? Yes, so it is. I could not marvel at the heavenly deeps if I had them not in me; I could not wonder at all this “pomp and garniture” of life if I were not of the life. Marcus Aurelius says,—“Reverence that which is best in the universe, and this is that which makes use of all things and directs all things; and in like manner also reverence that which is best in thyself; and *this is of the same kind as that.*” Tauler writes,—“St. Bernard says, ‘Why does my eye perceive the heavens, and not my feet. Because my eye is more like the heavens than my feet.’ Thus if my soul is to perceive God, it must be heavenly.” Religion appears as love, because in the infinite I may behold my kindred, my stock, my source, my own look and likeness, and so say,—I am of thee; Thou, O Infinite Life, and Love and Power, art my source of living, of loving, of doing.—This is faith! This is prayer!

Now, again, this thought and feeling of religion we wish to express. It is natural to strive to utter it, if only we speak few words and be not too bold for the spirit’s reverence. Expression of our religious thought and feeling is worship. For this we meet together and in simple forms strive to speak the unspeakable and give voice to our praise and joy; also to our needs and struggles. We come not to beg or beseech anything with loud entreaties and many appeals; but only to witness with a hushed and solemn reverence the truth of an unutterable relation. Because it can not be uttered, after we have done our best we shall

still be far from saying it, and in our words will lie some partiality, incompleteness, falseness; but it is more true and draws nearer the holy mystery to speak it as well as we can than not to utter it at all. The savage who is bowing fearfully before his grim idol has more of the truth of the heavens in his incantations than is in the bold march of a man who with bonneted head walks under the stars acknowledging no Infinite Life to claim his loving worship, and thinking of himself only as a worm's meat.

But worship should have a beautiful quality which I know not how better to name than noble reticence, a delicacy of feeling, an utterance which suggests much but shrinks from much more. By lack of this, some kinds of worship err sadly. They tear away that

"Sweet self-privacy in a right soul"

which

"Oustruns the earth and lines the utmost pole."

Yet striving after exalted expression helps true feelings. Also, by the direction of thought and by stillness, we can do something to prepare and garnish the mind's room for worship. We ought to come with peace and reverence, suiting our behavior to the sacred purpose of the place and hour. Surely this is an hour blessed for its escape from the prodigious interests and cares of the toiling world, from the whirl and the struggle, the fever, the ambition. For a brief space—too brief if we use it well and know its joyfulness—let us cast these daily things behind us, or climb above them, like a man standing on a high hill, who looks far over the earth and into the heavens, and awe is in his face.

Now we have these three,—Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion; whereby Religion makes a man, first, face himself strictly in Character; then his neighbor with love in Fellowship; then join with all for that justice among all and that grace in each which is Freedom.